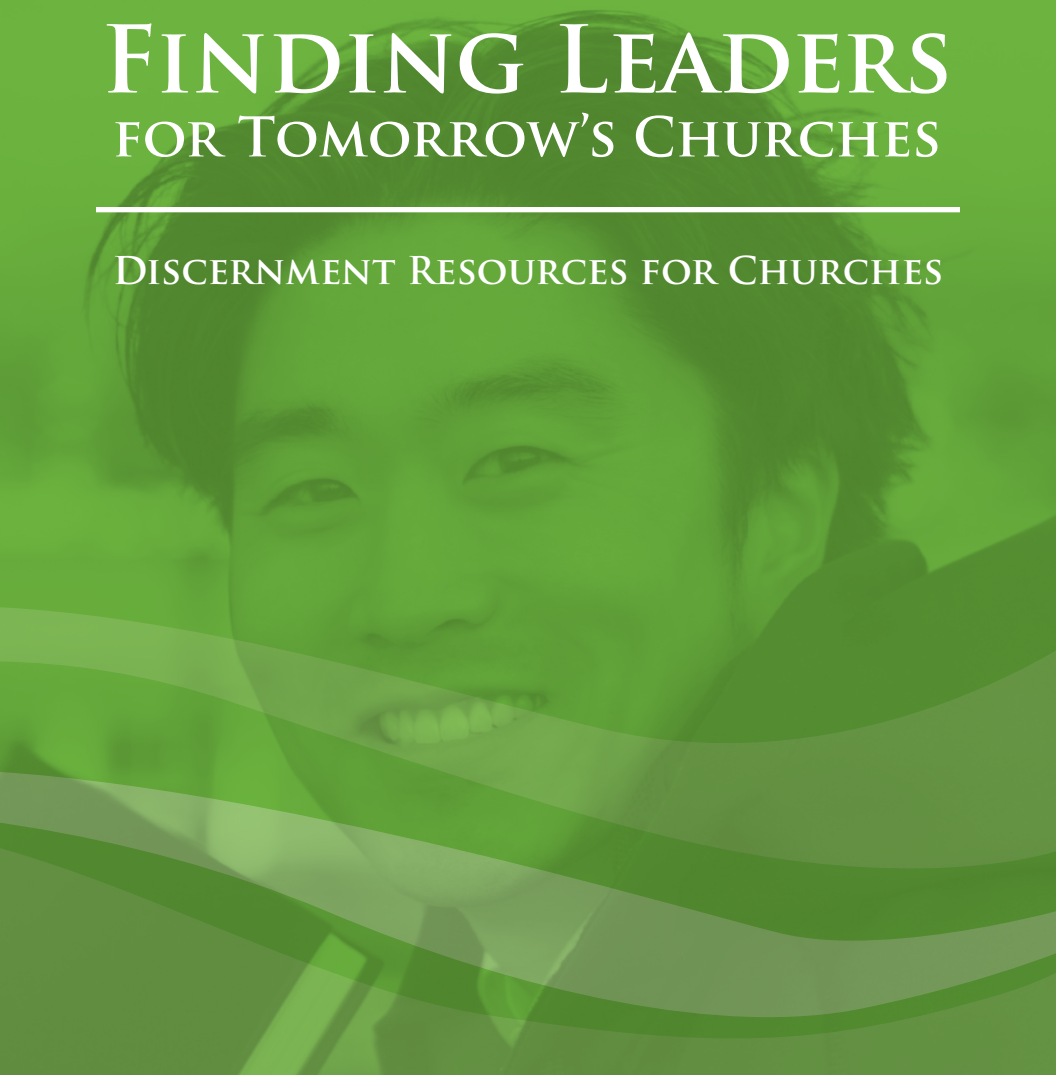

FINDING LEADERS FOR TOMORROW'S CHURCHES

DISCERNMENT RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES





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CONTENTS

Discerning Leaders for Ministry..... 5

- 1. The Responsibility of the Congregation 5
- 2. Practical Steps in Calling Someone to Vocational Ministry9

**Appendix A
Qualities for Ministry Guide..... 20**

- 1. Youth.....21
- 2. Young adults.....24
- 3. Second career individuals.....27

**Appendix B
Sample: Mentoring Relationship Agreement/
Growth Covenant..... 30**

INTRODUCTION

The story is told of a young person who was asked by an elder in the church, “So you are still teaching? When will you make the move and become our pastor?” The reply came quickly, “When the church asks me to make the change.” Within a year the junior high teacher was a pastor. Why? The church asked him to make a change.

As a church we are often surprised when people we thought might become pastors or missionaries pursue other vocational choices. At the same time we may be suspicious of those who have a single-minded pursuit of ministry as a vocational choice.

This guide is intended to assist churches and individuals in finding a balance between individual initiative and the call of the congregation. It includes:

- Suggestions for an overall approach to discernment
- The underlying values and philosophy that shape this process
- A listing of qualities to help churches identify potential leaders, and
- Detailed practical guidelines to the discernment process

The processes and resources provided in this document should be used thoughtfully, adapted to the local context, and bathed in prayer.

Even though one element of this document may apply more to either an emerging leader or those responsible for leadership development, close attention should be given to each part so that all involved can grasp the “big picture” of the discernment process. Using these materials will help you nurture emerging leaders as they grow into the calling the church has placed upon their lives. The contents may be adapted for your use or photocopied as needed. Updated versions of this resource are available at www.mbconf.ca.

DISCERNING LEADERS FOR MINISTRY

1. The Responsibility of the Congregation

One of the most important decisions churches make is who will lead us.

Sadly, many churches have embraced the notion that leaders are made elsewhere and that we can go “shopping” to find the leader who is suitable to our context. But ideally, the process of producing leaders is more like giving birth and less like shopping. The church ought to be the womb in which we grow leaders, with the initiative and responsibility for calling persons into ministry resting with the congregation. How amazing to realize that God has entrusted us with the privilege of calling emerging leaders into ministry and discipling them towards maturity. This practice is called discernment.

Too often the church has waited for leaders to show themselves, and then embraced them. The downside of this approach is that an individual’s sensitivity and obedience to the Holy Spirit is the hinge on which leadership development turns. In some cases, self-selecting leaders may approach ministry with inappropriate motivations or with a poorly-developed character and skills. Not surprisingly, these leaders often do not last.

Alternatively, the church looks for leaders to address a point of need. Unfortunately, need-driven recruitment usually results in a game of musical chairs where leaders are well shuffled but few new leaders are developed. These trends frequently result in a shortage of suitable leadership in the church.

A congregation's beliefs about calling people into ministry will determine what that church is willing (or not willing) to do. Our convictions about the balance of personal initiative and congregational initiative will greatly affect how our church discerns and empowers emerging leaders. Exploring these convictions is essential to creating a climate for calling people into ministry vocations.

For the church to truly fulfill its purpose, we must seize the truth that God has called us to pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers (Luke 10:2). Then we will need to become attentive to the work God has given to the church in developing and calling people into ministry. The quality of our discernment process directly affects the future of the church. As we bathe this process in prayer we find that God provides the leaders we need.

Reclaiming the role of the congregation as the discerning community that helps leaders develop requires that we critically reflect on how individualistic we have become. We have to turn and embrace a gospel that takes seriously the importance of the community of faith in shaping the ministry of individual believers. We must not underestimate how difficult it is to embrace the responsibilities of being such a discerning community. Even when we embrace this vision for leadership development, we will sometimes find it uncomfortable. It will need to be intentional.

Consider the biblical stories of people being called into ministry. How do these stories shape our thinking and practice?

1. Many leaders, such as Timothy, are called by their community and have no “dramatic” call story. However, these leaders all have a conviction that they are called and they must be obedient.
2. When God dramatically calls an individual – such as Moses, Mary, and Paul – it is often an unexpected, surprising and sometimes unwelcome event that changes the course of the person’s life. While God does sometimes call people in this way, to desire or prefer God’s dramatic intervention in our decision-making process is also to reject our responsibility to be discerning people.
3. Leaders grow and change. Consider leaders such as Josiah, David, and Peter who started ministry when they were immature but who increased in their maturity.
4. Communities always shape their leaders. A strong theme in Scripture is the interaction of God’s people and their leaders (examples include Joshua and Nehemiah). In a very real way, the people of God have always had to discover and recognize their leaders before they could follow them.

Leaders come in many different shapes and sizes. When we have a shopping mentality, we pick leaders we like, and the reasons for our choice are often superficial or obscure. When we are committed to giving birth to new leaders we must adjust our thinking in a number of ways:

First, we shouldn't just look internally for people we "like" who can do the job. We must learn to recognize emerging gifts and abilities in people who may be very different from us in temperament and personal style. Secondly, we need to learn to recognize undeveloped leadership potential and nurture these people into mature leaders. To do this, we must remember who it is we want to lead us. To further explore the development of a leader and growth in Christian maturity, study the brochure *Description of a Growing Disciple*, found at www.mbconf.ca.

If the church is going to identify and nurture the next generation of pastors and congregational leaders, we need to incorporate the following responsibilities:

1. Leadership development is a key ministry function of church leaders.
2. Congregations are responsible for intentionally engaging in the discernment and development of spiritual giftedness.
3. The local church takes the initiative in calling people to consider the challenge of Christian leadership and ministry vocations.
4. Individuals need to be open to the church's guidance about leadership opportunities, including the call to pastoral ministry.

2. Practical Steps in Calling Someone to Vocational Ministry

Discernment is more of an art than a science. It is rooted in relationship and is a creative and dynamic process. Discernment is intended to provide affirmation and direction. It should open doors and create opportunities for success. Through discernment, we celebrate, guide, bless, and support someone – whether, in the process, an individual is led toward or away from vocational ministry.

This section suggests a process by which discernment can move from being an idea to a workable process.

Focus on the Goal

Jesus commanded his followers, “Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest, for the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:2). As a church we play a central role in the future of God’s plan by calling people to respond to God’s invitation to join the harvest. The need for more pastors, missionaries, and leaders will increase as our vision of God’s harvest grows. Your congregation must understand the vital importance of being a calling and sending church if you are going to discern and nurture someone into ministry. This understanding must be developed both among the leadership of the church and among the congregation as a whole.

*Our goal is to become a growing,
reproducing Christian community
that makes an impact in our world.*

Make Leadership Development a Priority

- Identify those who already carry the mandate for leadership development. This can be done by asking, “Who is responsible for some aspect of leadership development in our church?”
- Assemble this group and compile a list of the leadership development activities already in place.
- Empower a team to create a plan for leadership development, coordinating activities, and financial resources. Challenge them to identify individuals who may have the potential gifts, aptitudes, and abilities to entertain a call to Christian leadership and pastoral ministry.
- Assess whether sufficient financial resources are available to support these leadership development plans.

Plan a Church Vocational Emphasis

- Give profile to the growing need for pastors, missionaries, and church leaders.
- Encourage people to pray about this growing need on a regular, long term basis as well as through designated periods of corporate prayer and fasting.

Know the Qualities that Suggest Leadership Potential

The traits described in the Qualities for Ministry Guide (Appendix A) help identify those who could be encouraged towards Christian leadership and ministry vocations.

- Reword the qualities and clues to reflect your church context.
- Spend time in your leadership development team praying and discussing about persons within the congregation who appear to have the needed qualities.
- Identify who will invite them into the discernment process.

Plan a Discernment Process

A discernment meeting is part of the overall strategy for leadership discernment, and is intended to help congregations identify a person's suitability for pastoral ministry, global mission, or church leadership. A discernment meeting is an opportunity for a team of people to provide wise counsel for the benefit of an individual and the church. It will help determine a clear picture of an individual's character and giftedness and will naturally lead to creating a plan for testing of gifts, and encouraging growth in ministry. It should also suggest a direction for future service.

a) Choose a Discernment Team

A discernment team is a small group of individuals selected for their ability to pray, share wisdom, and create opportunity in the discerning process around a particular emerging leader. Participants should include a pastor and church leadership representative, a spouse or family member, several peers of the emerging leader, significant mentors or co-workers in the church, and, if appropriate, a colleague in employment or education. A different combination of individuals may be chosen for the discernment process for each emerging leader. Participants should represent a cross-section of personality styles and each should possess a healthy self-awareness so they can be discerning of the candidate without introducing too many personal biases and issues. Participants should know the candidate reasonably well, and should be people whom the candidate respects and whose insight would be accepted and valued.

Members of the discernment team must commit to seeking what is best for the emerging leader, confidentiality, the success of the action plan, and completing all assigned preparation in advance of the discernment meeting. Members of the discernment team must be gentle, honest, and loving, but also candid and direct. Members of the discernment team should pray for the candidate throughout this process, asking God to give wisdom and insight.

b) Appoint a Discernment Team Leader

The person leading the discernment team will guide both the emerging leader and the discernment team through the process of discernment.

The person leading this process must clarify that all participants commit themselves to honest sharing. This includes saying difficult things in loving ways, and mentioning everything that is relevant. Omitting or withholding relevant information is not helpful and in fact, is a matter of dishonesty.

The discernment team leader is responsible to keep the meeting on course, to keep the goals in mind, and provide summaries or clarification of comments, to encourage the difficult things to be said in gentle ways, to keep a celebrative atmosphere, and to summarize what has been said after each section to focus the team's thinking and provide a transition to the next section.

c) Prepare for a Discernment Meeting

The leader of the discernment process should meet with the emerging leader to agree on the timeline and elements of the discernment process. The leader of this process must emphasize to the emerging leader the importance of preparing for the discernment meeting. Self-awareness on the part of the emerging leader is necessary for the success of this process. If you cannot reflect on who you are, it is questionable whether you will be able to receive the discernment of others.

The Qualities for Ministry Guide in Appendix A of this document is another useful resource in preparing a personal profile. Additional tools, resources, and inventories that help develop self-knowledge can be found at www.mbconf.ca or by calling the administrator of the Leadership Training Grant Matching Program at 1-888-669-6575.

■ As the emerging leader, prepare a personal profile. Such a profile should include:

- A description of significant transition points in your life and how they have shaped you.
- Description of church, school, and community involvement. Please comment on these, noting which you would do again and which you would not repeat. What opportunities would you take in the future that you have missed?
- Description of talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts.
- Personal reflections on your own character. A good measure of character is the fruit of the Spirit. Which ones are mature and which ones need the most attention to come to maturity?
- Description of own personality, including how you relate to people, how you respond to unknown situations, and approach problems or difficulties.
- Your testimony.
- Statement of career goals and/or ministry objectives. Complete this section with a few “If I could...” statements. These will help identify areas to develop or move towards in the future.
- Your resume.

- The emerging leader and the leader of the discernment process meet and discuss the personal profile, with the leader helping the emerging leader see whether the profile is complete and ready.
- Members of the discernment team prepare written reflection on the emerging leader's suitability for the desired ministry direction. This reflection identifies their talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts, as well as evaluates the emerging leader's character and maturity in each fruit of the Spirit. These reflections should be both affirming and cautionary.
- Copies of the emerging leader's personal profile are distributed by the leader of the discernment team to all members at least one week in advance of the discernment meeting.
- Each member of the discernment team reads through the profile, adding notes, insights, and questions. The team members think of areas that may have been missed as well as prepare affirmations and encouragements for the candidate.
- Discernment team members are encouraged to meet individually with the emerging leader on an informal basis to ask questions.
- Discernment team leader chooses location and time for the discernment meeting, allowing three hours for the meeting.
- Discernment team leader appoints a member of the discernment team to take detailed notes of the meeting.

d) Hold a Discernment Meeting

The actual discernment meeting should be a time of celebration and sharing about the candidate in comfortable surroundings with refreshments provided.

- Prior to meeting with the emerging leader, gather as a team to pray and talk through the process.
- Begin with prayer and verbal instructions on how the meeting will proceed. Outline the goals of the meeting.
- Give the emerging leader an opportunity to briefly share his or her story and some reflections on the profile s/he prepared.
- Provide opportunity for questions, comments, and affirmations based on what was verbally shared.
- Ask what specific counsel this team will give to the candidate regarding the future, and what recommendations they will make to the church. Also, ask how each person in the team will seek to nurture, develop, and provide opportunities for the candidate.
- Complete the process with words of wisdom and words of affirmation for the candidate. Allow the candidate to respond to the whole process. Finally, gather around the candidate and pray a prayer of blessing for him or her.
- Debrief the meeting without the candidate present. Determine specific recommendations.
- Review specific follow up assignments for team members.
- Communicate recommendations to candidate.
- Communicate recommendations to the church leadership and congregation.
- Prepare a written summary of results and recommendations of the discernment meeting.

*He is the one who gave these gifts to the church:
the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,
and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility
is to equip God's people to do his work and
build up the church, the body of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11-12

Recognize and Affirm the Call to a Ministry Vocation

- Identify who will be responsible for nurturing this person's growth in ministry.
- Draw the general leadership of the church into affirming, nurturing, and supporting the emerging leader and taking ownership for the nurturing process.
- Determine specific individuals or teams to be responsible for walking alongside the emerging leader through the growth process all the way to ministry placement.
- Create an occasion to bless this emerging leader for ministry and to recognize his or her response to the call of God and the church to pursue ministry as a vocation.

Enter Into a Covenant with Each Emerging Leader

A covenant that commits to nurturing the growth of an emerging leader is invaluable in guiding the learning process and assessing progress. This covenant should be simple and clear, outlining the responsibilities and expectations of all participants. See a sample covenant in Appendix B.

Provide Hands-on Experience

Effective nurturing of potential leaders requires giving them opportunities to experience the activities required in a ministry vocation. Hands-on experience permits leaders to discover strengths, weaknesses, and interests, as well as creating opportunity to develop new skills, knowledge, and confidence. Ultimately these opportunities test and validate the call. *The Leadership Development Trail Map* and supplementary material at www.mbconf.ca offer a guide to the many types of experience that are necessary for the development of an emerging leader. The brochure can be used to chart a leader's growth.

Assist in the Educational Experience

The church can be of tremendous help in determining what kinds of further training and education are necessary to prepare for ministry. Generally, this includes some combination of college, practical experience, and seminary. Another aspect of nurturing is providing financial support. Any assistance is a source of great encouragement. The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches partners with local congregations with a matching grant to significantly assist students with funds for tuition. See the Leadership Training Matching Grant Program at www.mbconf.ca.

Continue Contact and Support as a Sending Church

Ongoing connection with a sending congregation significantly shapes a growing leader. A great deal of transition and change occur during preparation for and movement into vocational ministry. Accept the challenge of seeing the candidate through to success. Be in regular and meaningful contact with this individual. Demonstrate your care and support in tangible ways, which could include visits, care packages, cards, sending helpful resources, and assuring the student of the prayers of the congregation on his or her behalf.

Where to from here?

You may be reading this guide through the eyes of someone seeking the discernment of your congregation, or you may be reading as a person within church leadership who has the opportunity to initiate the practice of discernment for ministry in your church. Take the opportunity to introduce the practice of discernment for ministry to others in your congregation and invite them to join you in a discernment process, using this guide.

APPENDIX A

Qualities for Ministry Guide

Congregations expect pastors to have particular skills, faith commitments, biblical understanding, and personality traits. As congregations engage in calling people into vocational ministry and nurturing these persons, we have to know what to look for.

While we cannot truly recognize another person's heart, there are clues in attitudes and behaviors that help us know when these qualities are present or growing.

Leaders can emerge in different life stages. Sometimes congregations discern leadership potential in youth. Young adulthood is a time for vocational decisions including that of ministry. Other people receive a call later in life. Qualities for ministry can look different at various stages of life. The following guide describes the qualities of ministry as they may appear at different life stages. Traits may appear in different ways depending on the life stage of the emerging leader, and how his or her experience builds on the foundational qualities of leadership.

As a leadership team, restate the qualities and clues to reflect the realities of your particular congregation.

1. Emerging Leaders: Youth

(ages 13-21)

While these leaders are young and are not yet mature, they will be developing the following qualities:

Quality 1: Is seeking to know God

A follower of Jesus engaged in a process of spiritual transformation.

Clues

- Speaks comfortably about personal faith
- Prioritizes time with God through Bible reading, prayer, journaling, and worship
- Participates in group Bible study and prayer
- Prays aloud in a group
- Engages in Christian fellowship and nurture
- Connects biblical faith with personal action or current events
- Has a growing concern for those who do not know Christ

Quality 2: Is moving toward being a whole person

A person who is developing moral integrity rooted in emotional and social wholeness.

Clues

- Exhibits self-worth and self-confidence
- Asks for help and shares leadership roles
- Demonstrates care by giving help
- Displays joy, hope, and optimism
- Serves with flexibility and empathy

- Acts fairly and acknowledges when failing to do so
- Treats members of the opposite sex with respect and dignity
- Acknowledges mistakes; seeks forgiveness
- Follows through on responsibilities
- Exhibits increasing self-control and high standards of personal conduct

Quality 3: Is a “connected” and relational person

A person whose relationships are characterized by mutuality.

Clues

- Expresses and demonstrates a commitment to positive family relationships
- Depends on others and is dependable
- Asks for help
- Stays connected to the local church
- Says “we” not “they”
- Is generous with time and money
- Knows how to win and how to lose
- Includes new people
- Actively listens to others
- Accepts leadership opportunities
- Is willing to ignore personal comfort to serve the needs of others

Quality 4: Is curious, adventurous, and creative

A person who sees life as a gift to be approached with respect, curiosity, and joy.

Clues

- Sees beyond the status quo or obvious
- Connects abstract ideas and concrete realities
- Is intrigued by possibilities
- Does not remain discouraged
- Is perceptive, intelligent, and winsome
- Displays energy and enthusiasm
- Uses imagination to find creative ideas and solutions
- Approaches new experiences with a spirit of adventure
- Is interested in new ideas and activities
- Crosses cultural boundaries
- Does not put others down
- Enjoys interaction with people of different ages
- Pursues opportunities to express giftedness

Quality 5: Is a person of commitment

A person who acts out of conviction, responds with compassion, and follows through on commitments.

Clues

- Makes a public profession of faith/seeks baptism
- Is an active church member
- Accepts responsibilities in the church
- Invites others to Christ and Christ's church
- Shows awareness of international issues and problems
- Extends care to those who are hurting, lonely, and discouraged
- Relates well to those who are different

2. Emerging Leader: Young Adult

(traditional college age or early career)

In addition to the foundational qualities and clues in section 1 that are foundational, the young adult leader will exhibit the following traits:

Quality 1: Possesses a sense of divine presence and calling

A person who exhibits a growing personal faith and who pursues ministry in the church and the world.

Clues

- Demonstrates and describes growing intimacy with God
- Prays
- Engages in reflection on the Scriptures
- Is perceived by others to be on a “spiritual journey”
- Knows and uses personal spiritual gifts in the church
- Identifies with a community of believers and related activities
- Reads books that deepen understanding of God’s will and way
- Raises questions about the meaning of faith and life

Quality 2: Possesses basic communication skills

A person who communicates clearly and persuasively in spoken and written forms.

Clues

- Is a well organized and clear communicator
- Is informative, enlightened, and motivational in conversation

- Is an attentive, active listener
- Is able to summarize and synthesize
- Is able to speak publicly
- Is able to engage with facts and ideas
- Enjoys telling stories

Quality 3: Possesses personal maturity and ego strength

A person who is free to live confidently even in ambiguous situations.

Clues

- Has a record of trustworthiness
- Rebounds from defeat
- Shows dependability in work and relationships
- Has lasting relationships with individuals and/or groups
- Reflects high moral and spiritual commitments in lifestyle
- Handles rather than dumps problems
- Demonstrates appropriate boundaries
- Is willing to be self-critical and to self-disclose where appropriate
- Is committed to cause(s) greater than self, e.g., social justice, peace, etc.
- Behaviors and priorities reflect commitments expressed

Quality 4: Demonstrates leadership skills

A person who holds the respect of others and who can envision and develop plans of action.

Clues

- Has been selected for leadership positions by peers or leaders
- Has a track record of leadership accomplishments
- Works well with a variety of people

- Has opinions, ideas, and skills respected and sought by peers and others
- Encourages group spirit
- Exhibits sense of hopefulness
- Is able to delegate
- Makes decisions and enables others to make decisions

Quality 5: Has an inquiring mind

A person with a genuine curiosity, love of learning, critical thinking ability, and capacity to tolerate ambiguity.

Clues

- Exhibits a range of interests in reading and activities
- Exhibits breadth and depth in conversation
- Is open to and enjoys learning
- Has effective study habits
- Makes informed decisions and applications
- Is not threatened by new ideas
- Is willing to debate ideas and dialog about issues with others

Quality 6: Expresses empathetic caring

A person who possesses empathy and cares for others, yet is aware of personal boundaries and limitations.

Clues

- Displays self-esteem and humility
- Acts out convictions and values
- Shows concern for others
- Is able to give and receive care
- Is concerned about non-violence
- Thinks about consequences of own actions
- Has appropriate boundaries
- Recruits others to help in addressing needs

3. Emerging Leaders: Second Career Individuals (age 30+)

In addition to the qualities and clues in sections 1 & 2 that are foundational, a second career individual will exhibit the following qualities:

Quality 1: Expresses a sense of call

A person whose relationship to Christ is expressed in a confident, hopeful love for the church.

Clues

- Is actively involved in some form of ministry
- Experiences or anticipates the need to refocus life, makes a life-stage transition
- Exhibits a growing relationship with Christ through prayer, devotional life, and worship
- Has a positive attitude toward the church as the people of God

Quality 2: Possesses personal qualities and gifts for leadership

A person who shows evidence of being a leader, formally and informally.

Clues

- Demonstrates intelligence, initiative, analytical ability
- Uses power appropriately, addressing conflict and initiating reconciliation
- Has exhibited leadership in previous careers; shows evidence of intentional, developmental progression in career
- Shows good judgment; is self-disciplined
- Is open to change
- Good teacher and communicator

- Maintains clear boundaries
- Shows ability to admit error; shows evidence of self-acceptance
- Inspires others
- Seeks out mentors deliberately
- Is a faithful follower of Jesus

Quality 3: Is skilled in interpersonal relationships

A person who is comfortable with self and who exhibits love for people.

Clues

- Relates well with diverse groups of people
- Demonstrates personal maturity, trustworthiness, integrity, and good character.
- Is usually not defensive
- Possesses a good sense of humor and flexibility
- Shows altruistic behavior; is caring; is a good listener
- Is compassionate and empathetic, not exploitive
- Is willing to embrace the ideas of others and is teachable

Quality 4: Is prepared to risk

A person who seeks to make a difference in the church and the world, even at personal cost.

Clues

- Shows courage of convictions
- Willing to take a prophetic stance within the church community
- Values cross-cultural experience
- Shows entrepreneurial initiative

Quality 5: Empowers others

A person who is committed to empowering and preparing others for their ministries in the world and in the church.

Clues

- Nurtures or mentors others in ministry
- Is actively involved in ministries of the local church
- Is purposeful in developing relationships with unbelievers
- Displays caring concern for people in need

Remember that this guide is only one resource. Examining a person's maturity in the fruit of the Spirit and the integration of their personal and public integrity is the most important qualifier of an emerging leader, followed by the evidence of spiritual gifts appropriate to their sphere of ministry.

Qualities for Ministry Profile is adapted with permission from the Office of Guidance and Recruitment for Ministry, Educational Ministries of the American Baptist Churches.

APPENDIX B

Mentoring Relationship Agreement/Growth Covenant

This document should help you:

1. Establish a relationship and agree on its purpose
2. Determine the growth desired or the outcomes to be assessed
3. Define the regularity of interaction
4. Determine the type of accountability
5. Set up communication mechanisms
6. Clarify level of accountability
7. Set the life cycle of the relationship
8. Identify periodic evaluation points
9. Allow for purposes and expectations to be adjusted
10. Bring closure to the relationship

Adapted from *Connecting*, by Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, p. 197 ff, Navpress, 1992.

Complete these brief statements to help you achieve the purposes listed on page 30.

Date: _____

This is an agreement between _____ and _____, to clearly establish a relationship of mentoring.

We agree that this mentoring relationship is to accomplish the following purpose (name specific areas of growth to be measured):

We will interact (circle one): daily weekly biweekly monthly

Our accountability will be as described:

The following are our stated ground rules for communication:

We are committed to the following level of confidentiality and trust:

We will continue until _____, at which time we will re-evaluate the nature of this relationship.

We will meet for evaluation and feedback (circle one):

biweekly monthly quarterly

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Information for students and discernment resource for churches also available at:

www.mbconf.ca